

THE DAUGHTER OF DON Q.

DON Q. sat in his cave. For a long time nothing of note had happened in the sierra, and it was at such periods that enmity grew upon the great brigand.

He was sitting over his fire, touching occasionally the strings of his guitar, for music was always a great solace to him. Indeed at times he would chant in his stolid voice songs of old Spain and its long dead glories. He had always given strict orders that none was to interrupt him while he made music. It was, therefore, with an eye bright with anger that he turned toward the sound of scuffling and of voices, which evidently came from the narrow path to his cave.

"I tell you," said a voice, that of a woman, "that I must see my lord at once."

"It cannot be," replied another voice, this time a man's, that of Gaspar. "My lord plays upon the guitar."

From this there followed sounds of a struggle. Don Q. went to the door of the cave.

"Gaspar, did I not recognize your voice?" said he.

"It is not my fault, lord. She would come here, though she is as cunning as a pine-marten and fights like a wild cat. Hold her, Gregorio, hold her!" But it was too late. The woman had broken from the bandits and was running toward the entrance.

"I must see you, my lord," she panted. "I am Marta, old Marta."

As he recognized her, Don Q.'s face grew pale.

"Rest assured, Marta," said he, "that I will listen to what you have to say, but first—Gaspar! Gregorio!" he called.

The two bandits presented themselves, and looked over with their bleak, unfriendly stare, while they shifted from one leg to the other.

"What were my orders?" said he. "Did not say that I was not to be disturbed?"

"Yes, my lord, but—"

Don Q. held up his hand. "In the mountains there are no excuses."

Don Q. turned and once again sat down by his fire.

"And now, Marta," said he, "you will tell me what I owe this visit."

THE old woman—for she looked old, though she was not more than fifty years of age—had thrown back her mantilla, exposing her craggy and wrinkled face.

"My lord," she cried, "a terrible thing has happened."

"Dona Nieves, is she dead?" questioned Don Q.

"No, lord, no, she flourishes, but—"

The relaxation of his muscles showed the strain of anxiety through which Don Q. had passed.

"Then," said he, "you will tell me in as few words as possible what is the terrible thing that has happened."

"Yes, lord," said he, "I will tell those names. There have been Counts of Pólema since the days of Philip the Second, and the blood of the de Rals goes at least as far back. What of these young ones?"

"It is that she is too beautiful. Where are the brightest stars when the moon swims up into the sky? It is that these two can be seen on the same night. The other night, on Friday night, both of them, one after the other, begged to find favor in her eyes and she answered them—oh, that she did them!"

"What did she answer them?"

"They told her all that they had to offer—the ancient names of the rich lands, the broad verandas, the Count de Pólema—Don Jaime de Ral, I noted those names. There have been Counts of Pólema since the days of Philip the Second, and the blood of the de Rals goes at least as far back. What of these young ones?"

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"And what were these dreadful words, Marta?" he asked.

"She said, let any who sought her kill Don Q. and then she would speak with him again. To each he spoke separately an hour of each other, and by night it had been whispered abroad through Seville that the road to the heart of Don Nieves lay through the heart of you, my lord—through you who are her father!"

At the words Don Q. sprang to the opening of the cave and looked out. The night was still, and the brigands lay around their fire. Reassured, he returned.

"Marta," said he, "twenty years ago you awoke not only to the beat of my heart, but to the beat of my name, that name which only you and I in all the world know was once mine: you awoke that you would forget that when her and Don Q. were here, you had broken your heart."

"Forgive me, lord; forgive me, but this is indeed a fearful thing. These men are strong, and there are but few in the world which would dare to turn them to terrible actions for her sake."

It was on the second day after Marta had brought the news into the camp that he had renewed her oath of secrecy in such manner and under such circumstances as insured that never would she speak of him again. To each he spoke separately an hour of each other, and by night it had been whispered abroad through Seville that the road to the heart of Don Nieves lay through the heart of you, my lord—through you who are her father!"

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man. Few friends seek me here in the mountains."

"We hardly count ourselves friends," replied Pólema, in his suavely insolent voice.

"So tell you are here," said Don Q.

"Not altogether of our own will,"

put in Don Jaime, with a laugh. "I do not know how it was with the bandit, but I was ambushed in the foothills."

"Indeed! then my men must have been patrolling lower than usual,"

said Pólema bitterly. "When a man came in for a cup of wine, when a bandit had broken from the bandits and was a fugitive in the mountains."

"That seems fair," said Don Jaime.

"If I refuse, what will happen?"

"That is quite simple. You will be

lodged in that straw-covered hut that you see on the other side of the fires.

had the misfortune to quarrel with the count because I do not like the accent which he has. So much I am concerned, that is my grievance."

Don Q. bowed to Don Jaime. "I perceive," said he, "that you are a fine fellow. But enough of this, senor. While you are here, I will do you well to do me the kindness not to attack each other, for if one of you were killed I should not be able to deserve it to my bandit friends when his ransom arrives, and perhaps they would even believe that I had had a hand in his death! So there must be no more fighting."

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THE two men sat in the straw-covered hut, looking over the mountains.

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